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ABSTRACT

The booklet presents information for parents of gifted and talented children. Topics addressed include the following: identification (early development, intellectual traits, language and academic skills, interests, and social and individual characteristics); parents' role in the education of their gifted/talented children; ways to encourage the children's unusual talents; potential educational and social problems encountered by gifted/talented children; and support sources for parents. (CL)

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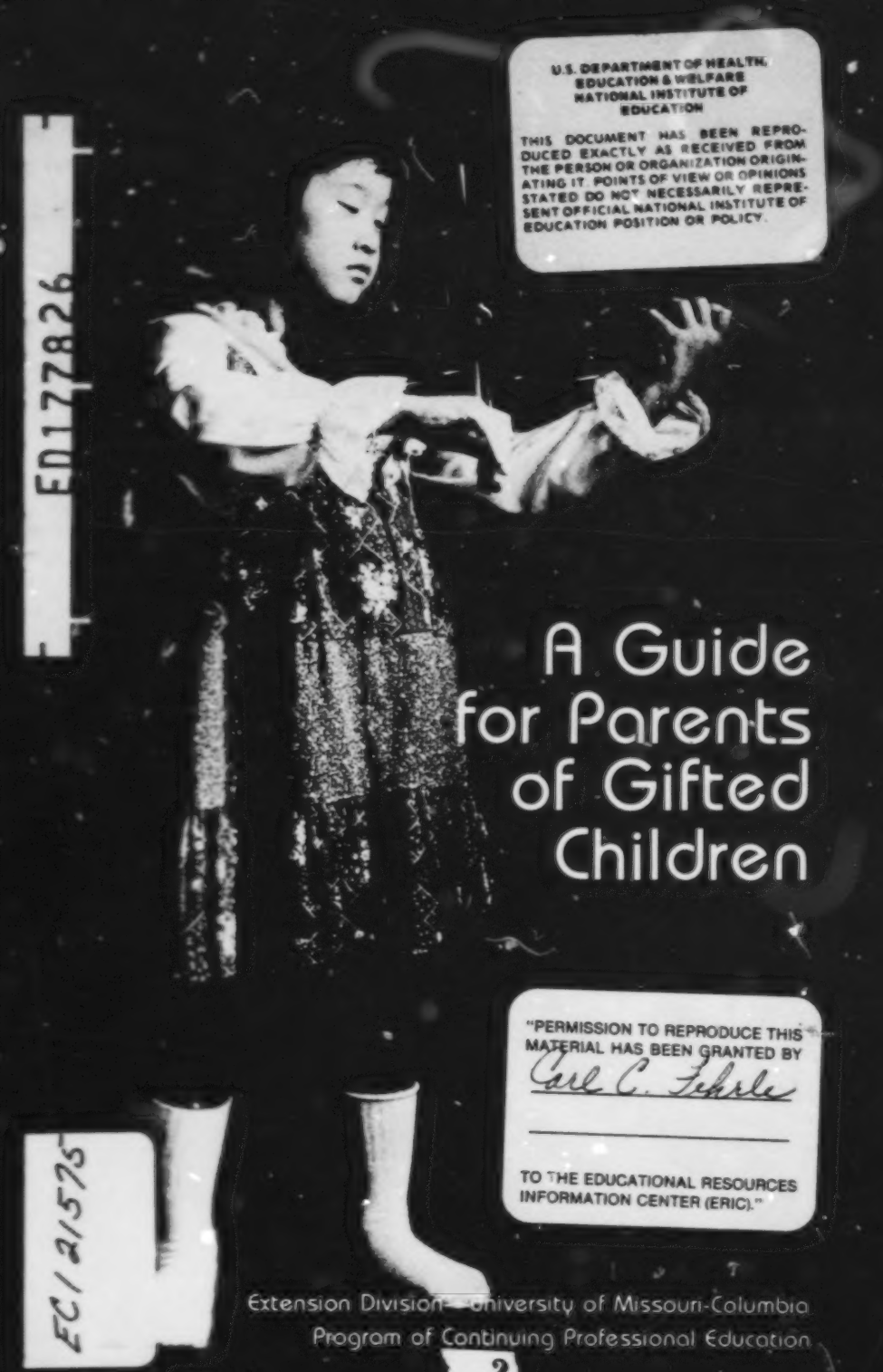

A Guide for Parents of Gifted Children

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SCIENC

Introduction

A great emphasis of society in recent years has been to upgrade the education of the least able in our society. It has been easy to see the needs of these children and to feel justified in planning programs of care and education for them. But what have we done for the gifted child?

Missouri Commissioner Arthur Mallory states,

> The brightest, most talented and most creative students in the public schools today are one of our greatest 'natural resources.' Yet, at a time when there is widespread concern about students who have 'special needs,' gifted and talented children are, too often, the most misunderstood and overlooked group in school.[1]

Perhaps we have not been as clear and demanding about the needs of our gifted and talented children. As parents, you need to ask yourselves the following questions:

- Are your gifted/talented children challenged by the employed methods of education?
- Are they searching for ways of understanding themselves?
- Are they learning how they fit into the world in which they are participating?

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[1]Arthur L. Mallory, "'IEP's' and Other Modest Proposals for Gifted Students," *Missouri Schools*, Vol. 43, No. 8, (April 1978) p. 26.

- Are they being recognized for their success in academics?
- Are educators excited about working with them?
- Are educators eager to provide special programs for these students?

As parents you are partners in their education. You can do much for your gifted/talented children. You are the most significant people in their lives and are the ones who can encourage their growth and support them in their daily struggles.

You can encourage teachers, administrators, and community leaders to join in your endeavor to see that the educational programs which meet their needs are provided. These children need your support and assistance.

However, first you must review the following questions.

- How do I know if my child is truly gifted and/or talented?
- What is my role as a parent in the education of my child?
- As a parent, how can I encourage my child's unusual talents?
- Will my child encounter social and educational problems?
- Where can I find support and help?

How do I know if my child is truly gifted and/or talented?

There are numerous ways in which a person may be talented and/or gifted. These talents may be in the areas of intellect, the arts, aesthetics, leadership, psychomotor ability, or unusual and creative thinking.

Some clues to your child's abilities may surface very early. You may observe some of the following characteristics. Put an x by those you have already observed and place a ✓ by the others as you observe them. It would be helpful to place a date when you observe the characteristics.

Early Development

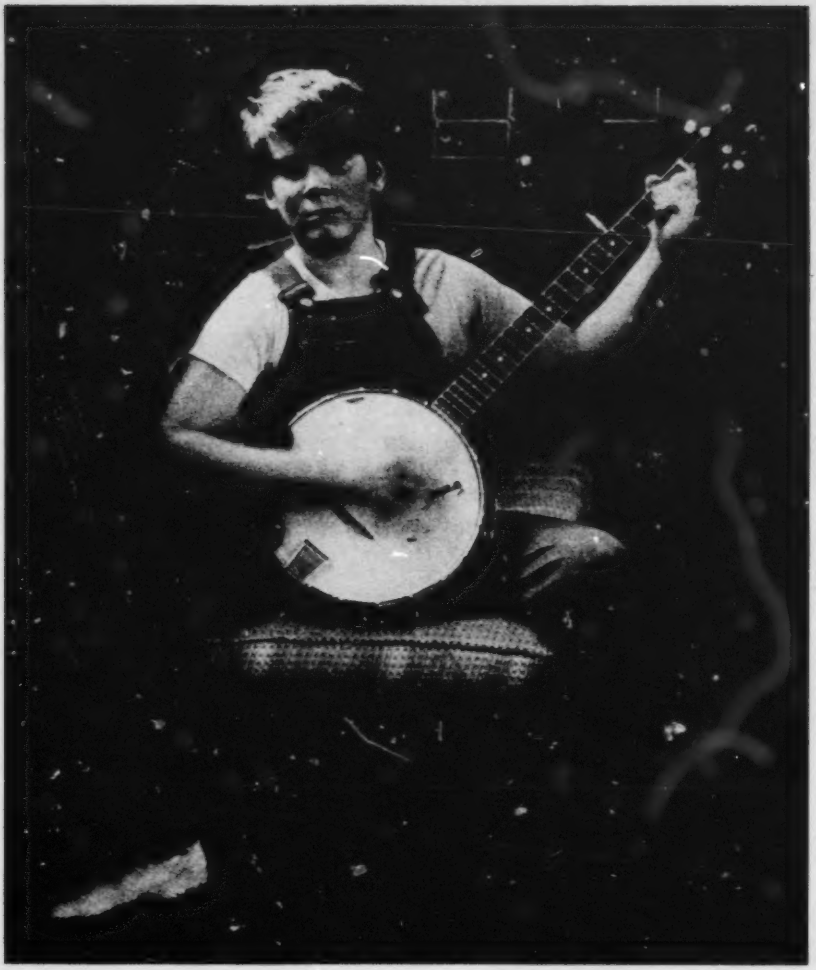
_____Uses large vocabulary and develops the ability to speak in entire sentences at an unusually early age (age 2 or 3 and may use invented words).

_____Displays high interest in books and learns to read at the preschool age.

_____Learns to play a musical instrument such as the piano before school age.

_____Shows proficiency in some art form such as drawing, painting, or sculpture.

_____Has the ability to maintain attention for long periods of time.



_____Has interest in and can demonstrate an advanced skill such as mathematics, science, or mechanics.

_____Shows knowledge of money values, stamps, distances, clocks, and calendars.

_____Understands game playing and can follow or create rules and methods of keeping scores.

_____Can easily play alone and does creative thinking.

_____Demonstrates advanced skills to the extent that others notice his accelerated ability.

Other characteristics that you may observe at any age are:

Intellectual Traits

_____Makes unusually keen observations and has an excellent memory.

_____Displays great curiosity.

_____Shows intense interest in a variety of subjects and has imaginative insights.

_____Demonstrates skills beyond his years.

_____Carries out instructions with ease even when they are complicated. (Can remember five steps in a set of directions and execute them successfully.)

_____Enjoys intellectual challenges, organizes thoughts well and displays good judgment.

_____Gathers and recalls a wide range of general knowledge and information.

Language and Academic Skills

_____Shows excellent command of the language and is able to use it fluently in speaking.

_____Has and uses a wide vocabulary and may enjoy the use of long words.

_____Enjoys writing stories, poems, or plays.

_____Has fluency in a second language.

_____Has the ability to learn quickly and may progress through school faster than other children the same age.

_____Knows and understands scientific information beyond his age.

_____Has wide range of information from the social studies.

_____Understands and can use advanced mathematical processes and excels in problem solving.

_____Enjoys keeping up with political and world issues.

Interests

_____Shows persistence in exploring an idea, wanting to know as much as can be known about an interest.

_____Has many interests and aptitudes.

Has high interest and exceptional performance in the following and will probably receive special honors in these areas:

_____music

_____art

_____drama

_____graphic arts

_____dance

_____athletics

_____Sets high standards for achievement and tends to be a perfectionist.

_____Enjoys searching for information relating to interests.

_____Enjoys making records of events or keeping diaries.

_____Makes well organized collections of various things (stamps, coins, rocks, shells, or insects).

Social and Individual Characteristics

_____Tends to be independent, individualistic, and self-sufficient.

_____Can be stubborn.

_____May be bored by routine.

_____Has a good sense of humor.

_____Can easily occupy own time without stimulation from others.

_____Likes to be with and converse with adults or older children.

_____Becomes impatient with situations which offer no challenge.

_____May be considered different by other children.

_____Is generally thoughtful and has genuine concern for others.

_____Assumes leadership roles easily and is often chosen by others for leadership.

_____Has a good sense of justice.

_____Is dependable and responsible.

These lists are by no means complete, but they may give you some ideas. There are probably more characteristics that would exemplify your child which have not been mentioned.

Some talents develop early, others do not appear until much later. Somtimes it may be discovered in a school setting through testing and teacher or specialist observation. Generally, the talented child will score very high on intelligence tests or achievement tests. They tend to have IQ scores of 130 or above and generally do superior work in school.

What is my role as a parent in the education of my child?

The most important relationship your child has is with you. You play two important roles—an observer and a facilitator. From the time your child enters kindergarten, you should give teachers information that you have gained from observations. In the other grades, you should take the responsibility of contacting the teachers and keeping them informed.

As a parent observer and facilitator, check those which apply to you and to your child.

_____My child has continued his special interests in art, mathematics, science or mechanics.

_____My child has the space and materials at home to explore his special interests.

_____I allow my child the freedom to explore and express new ideas—orally and in written form.

_____I provide support and encouragement for my child to search for new knowledge.

_____I have respect for education and the development of talents such as music, art, and athletics.

_____I encourage experimentation with ideas and questioning by providing newspapers and magazines. I see that they have the opportunity to attend cultural activities.

_____I allow my child to grow without undue pressures and without exploitation.

_____I allow my child to spend time doing those things which he/she enjoys in a recreational way even though they may seem ordinary (watching television or usual play activities).

_____I encourage friendships and healthy relationships with all family members including uncles, aunts, cousins, and grandparents.

_____I listen to the advice of the professionals who work with my child and speak to parents at school activities.

I listen and answer my child's questions about:

_____sex

_____death

_____illness

_____war

_____other life issues

The goal is to have more "yes" replies when you review this six months from now.

As a parent, how can I encourage my child's unusual talents?

The first basic need to be supplied by the home is love. For this there is no substitute. This must be love of the child—not of his accomplishments. This love must come from within the home where the child's security is built.

The home must establish a system of values by which the child can direct his/her life. Parents are the most important teachers of this. These values can determine whether a child's future life will be good, bad, or something in between.

Another basic need is to learn to live democratically with others. This may be especially frustrating for the gifted/talented child who possibly must live intellectually with one group of peers and physically and socially with another.

You need to provide initial intellectual and artistic stimulation, too. Your child should experience having good books read, hearing good music and have a chance to express through art.

You will need to build a sense of trust in your child. This is the primary outcome of the first year of life which results from meeting physical needs with a demonstration of love. Another task is to develop independence, hopefully in the right proportion.

Your children will also need to learn to accept responsibility, and you as parents should permit them to have new experiences and make friends of their own, on their own.

As parents you need to stimulate the gifted/talented child's mind to believe thinking is fun; make problem solving and learning a pleasure; and make developing curiosity and interests attractive. You will soon learn that your child usually need not be encouraged to begin to ask questions, but remember, your child needs to be encouraged to continue to ask them.

Perhaps the following statements will help you to encourage your child's unusual talents. Put an x preceding the statement you already do. Place a ✔ by the ones you would like to do. Be proud of your accomplishments and desires.

_____I show an interest in my child's activities and provide materials.

_____I encourage my child to select learning activities.

_____I encourage my child to seek adults of various careers, talents, and abilities and converse with them.

_____I encourage my child to relate to other children and share projects and interests with others.

_____I take advantage of family field trips such as museums, art galleries, libraries, musical performances, movies, parks, zoos, and historical places.

_____I arrange with the school to get my child excused to take family trips to see other parts of the country.

_____I permit my child to explore unusual ways of thinking.

_____I provide my child with private lessons when I notice my child has specific skills. (Music, art dancing, and swimming)

_____I take time to listen when he wants to talk to me and discuss a variety of ideas.

_____I encourage my child to take advantage of all the free enrichment materials that are available in such as government pamphlets, ads in magazines, and book clubs. I expect my child to do the corresponding.

_____I take time to talk at length about behavior that is in question. (It is amazing, but children of unusual intellect are able to handle and understand rational thinking and usually have a strong sense of justice.)

Will my child encounter social and educational problems?

Most research has shown that not only do gifted and/or talented children tend to be superior in intellect, but they are healthy, active in social affairs, and feel good about themselves and their accomplishments. They seem to display interest in many things, have strong wills and are of good character.

However, you need to be prepared for some of the areas of conflict and give assistance when needed.
Brace yourself! As these occur, check them off.

_____Your child will not always want to conform to school routines, social situations, and relationships with peers. This stems from creative abilities. In fact, the child might rebel against formal learning. If your child is not challenged in school, he/she may become bored and may even become a behavior problem. The teachers will need to vary their style of teaching and methods of presentation.

_____There are times when your child will be alone in an opinion or belief. As you work patiently, the child find ways of coping with differing opinions.

_____Your child may grow up wanting to explore areas that society says are not within "normal" expectations because the child is a boy or girl. Students are seeing that more careers are open for either sex. As a parent, you can contact your school counselor and obtain curent information.

_____Your child might find it difficult to find friends, as he does not "fit in." At times, the child may feel a separation from peers, teachers, and even parents. At these times the special interests or hobbies can occupy their time and permit them to do some critical thinking.

_____You should not be surprised if your child may state, "You do not understand me," "I hate you," and "You do not love me." The child may experience hostility from others. It is wise not to get excited and fight or argue back at this time. Seek guidance through your school principal and counselor.

Your role during these stages becomes extremely important. It is your task to help your child understand the reactions of others and find ways of

being accepted. Put forth a special effort to be sensitive to your child. While the child needs your warmth and closeness, there will be times when the child needs to be alone to work out solutions.

You must work to help your child continue to build self-image—an image that can hold together even in the face of disapproval from others. One of the most important factors in creating this image is your constant understanding and encouragement which provides the opportunity for evaluation and change.

Encourage your child to see there may be more than one answer to a particular problem. Adults realize that some issues have no definite answer, and he should be willing to accept the ideas of others.

To summarize, it is a frustrating task to live with a gifted/talented child. There are times you will be discouraged with your tasks. It might be wise for you to have your own career, interests, and hobbies at these particular times. When you are exposed to the world and the problems of others, you will return refreshed to the situation.

Where can I find support?

Seek support from your school. In many places there are no special programs for the gifted, but there are always teachers and administrators who are interested in making special arrangements for the gifted. They know of recent books and articles that you can read and can direct you to special workshops and seminars for parents.

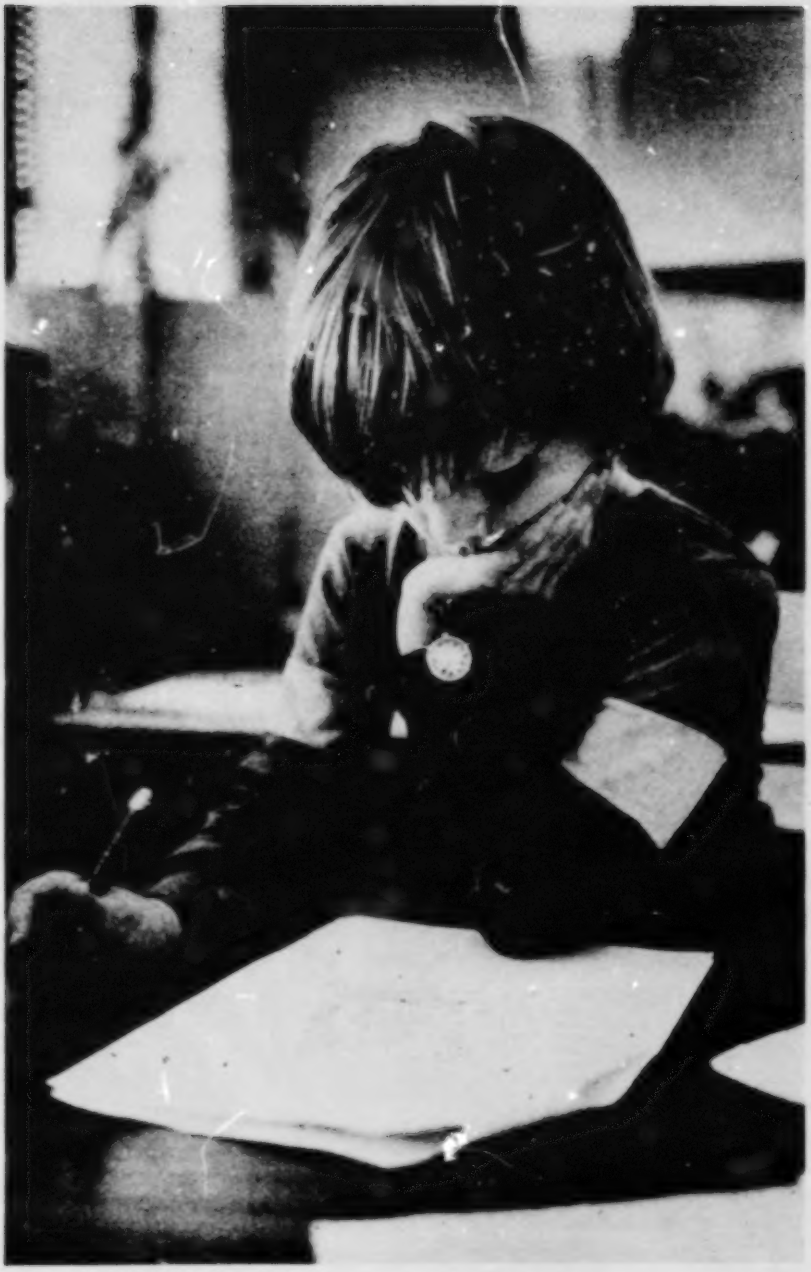
Check with your local Parent-Teacher Association to see if it is willing to sponsor special meetings. If not, the school might provide you with a list of other parents who have gifted children. You might want to organize this group of interested parents to meet monthly just to talk about the needs of your children and how others have met these needs.

You might ask resource people to speak to your group. You will find reinforcement and comfort in hearing what others have to say.

You may find support and valuable information from your state department of education. Find out if there is a person assigned to work with the gifted and talented in the special education area. This person will be able to advise you as to what is being done in your state and probably can direct you to programs already operating that you may want to observe.

In Missouri write to:

Special Education
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
100 East Capitol
P.O. Box 480
Jefferson Building
Jefferson City, MO 65101



Try to become aware of federal programs and funds as they become available.

In 1969, Congress passed Public Law 91-230 which directed the U.S. Commissioner of Education to investigate present programs and to make necessary recommendations for improvement.

> "Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of out-standing abilities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society."[2]

The Federal legislation recognizes giftedness that should be developed in not only academic areas, but in all of the following areas:

- general intellectual ability
- specific academic aptitude
- creative or productive thinking
- leadership ability
- physical and performing arts
- psychomotor ability

You may find access to current information by writing directly to Director, Education of the Gifted and Talented, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, Washington, DC 20202. They will be able to direct you to government publications of interest to your group.

The Gifted Child Quarterly would also be another resource that your group might want to get. There are generally articles in each issue written with parents in mind.

Another valuable resource is the ERIC Clearinghouse which will send you information upon request. Write to:

ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091

In this time of increased technology, rapid change and complex social issues, we cannot afford to overlook one of our most valuable resources—our gifted and talented children. Today's world needs the creative abilities and leadership that the gifted can one day provide. It is our responsibility to provide the educational opportunities to nourish the creative energies of our youth and give them the chance to dream dreams to build a tomorrow full of hope and productivity.

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[2]U.S. Office of Education, Public Law 91-230, Section 806.

About the Authors

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He received his doctorate in elementary education from the University of Iowa in 1964 and has been at the University of Missouri-Columbia since 1968. For the past five years he has been project director for the courses in Teaching Legal Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship in a Free Society.

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She received her bachelor's degree in elementary education from the University of Nebraska in 1968 and her master's degree in education from the University of Missouri in 1978. She also taught elementary school in Nebraska.

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U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Education of the Gifted and Talented, Report to the Congress of the United States by the U. S. Commissioner of Education and Background Papers Submitted to the U. S. Office of Education,* 92d Congress, 2d session, 1972.

In the final analysis a nation is measured by the products of it's most gifted people. Whether this be a Galileo, a Rembrandt, a Beethoven or a Shakespeare the contributions which accrue to the contemporary society are significantly greater than any social investment in them. Furthermore, these contributions provide enrichment for succeeding generations and often open new doors for leaps into the future for those of us who are less precocious. Thus, there should be no problem of justifying funds and special attention for the nuture and development of the most gifted and talented.

But, the first and fundamental responsibility for the future and direction of the young is not the society at large - not even the school. It is within the confines of the most basic social building block, the family, that the most significant events take place which will mold the young. This places a heavy responsibility upon parents, but one which, if accepted conscientiously and fulfilled judiciously, should bring great returns in personal satisfaction and feelings of accomplishment.

The material in this monograph is designed to be of assistance to parents in fulfilling this responsibility. Dr. Fehrle and Ms. Brown have provided some guidelines, checklists and suggestions which should be valuable to any parent in identifying and guiding their gifted offspring.

Charles H. Koelling
Assistant Dean
College of Education

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